UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT EASTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

-----X Docket#

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, : 24-mj-00404-CLP-4

- versus -: U.S. Courthouse

: Brooklyn, New York

LONG PHI PHAM,

: June 4, 2024 Defendant : 2:41 p.m.

TRANSCRIPT OF CRIMINAL CAUSE FOR ARRAIGNMENT BEFORE THE HONORABLE CHERYL L. POLLAK UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

P P E A R A N C E S: Α

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Proceedings recorded by electronic sound-recording, transcript produced by transcription service

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                            Proceedings
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              THE CLERK:
                          This is a Criminal Cause for
 2
   Arraignment on the complaint, USA v. Long Phi Pham.
                                                         The
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   case number is 24-mj-404.
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              Counsel, your name for the record? Appearing
 5
   for the government?
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              MR. WEINTRAUB: Good afternoon, your Honor.
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   Benjamin Weintraub and David Berman for the United
 8
   States.
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              THE CLERK: Thank you very much.
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              THE COURT: Good afternoon.
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              THE CLERK: And appearing for Mr. Pham?
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              MR. SOSNICK: Good afternoon, your Honor. It's
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    a pleasure to appear before you. My name is Michael L.
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   Sosnick and I'm appearing on behalf of Mr. Pham.
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              THE CLERK: Thank you very much.
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              THE COURT: Good afternoon. Good afternoon,
   Mr. Pham.
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              THE DEFENDANT: How are you doing?
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              THE COURT: I take it you understand English?
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              THE DEFENDANT: Yes.
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              THE COURT: Okay. If at any point something is
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    said that you don't understand, please tell me. All
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    right?
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              THE DEFENDANT:
                             Thank you.
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              THE COURT: You're here today because the
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## Proceedings

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grand -- excuse me. You're here today because you've been charged in a complaint with in or about and between January 2024 and the present, both days being approximate and inclusive within the Eastern District of New York and elsewhere, you together with others did knowingly and intentionally conspire to devise a scheme and artifice to deprive betting company 1, an online sports betting company, the identity of which is known to the affiant of the complaint, and that you obtained money and property from betting company 1 by means of one or more materially false and fraudulent pretenses, representations, and promises. And for the purpose of executing this scheme, you transmitted and caused to be transmitted by means of wire communication in interstate and foreign commerce writings, signs, signals, pictures, and sounds in violation of United States law. Have you seen the complaint before?

THE DEFENDANT: I looked at it briefly.

THE COURT: Okay. All right. Now, you do not have to say anything here today. If you start to say something, you can stop at any time. But what you must understand is that anything you do say, except what you say to your attorney, anything else can be used against you. Do you understand that?

THE DEFENDANT: I understand.

4 Proceedings 1 THE COURT: Okay. Now, I understand counsel, 2 you are retained in this matter? 3 MR. SOSNICK: Yes, your Honor. THE COURT: Okay. So Mr. Pham, I know you have 4 5 retained counsel but if for some reason at any point in 6 the future that you cannot afford counsel, the Court will 7 appoint an attorney for you. That is because you have 8 the right to be represented by an attorney from this point forward in connection with these charges. Do you 9 understand that? 10 11 THE DEFENDANT: I understand. 12 THE COURT: Okay. What's the -- well, let me ask, first of all, counsel, I take it that you have 13 14 reviewed the complaint with your client and advised him 15 of his rights? 16 MR. SOSNICK: Yes. 17 THE COURT: Okay. What's the government's 18 position with respect to bail for Mr. Pham? 19 MR. WEINTRAUB: Your Honor, the government is seeking detention at this time. The government's 20 21 position is that there are no conditions or set of 22 conditions that can reasonably assure the Court of the 23 defendant's future reappearance at court proceedings. 24 In short, the defendant, and specifically his 25 conduct over the last few days, has demonstrated that he

poses a significant risk of flight. I'm happy to elaborate on that further at the moment.

THE COURT: Yes, please.

MR. WEINTRAUB: The circumstances surrounding the defendant's arrest really speak volumes here. And I can just start the story last week.

On Thursday, the government attempted to interview one of the defendant's co-conspirators. On Friday, one day later -- and that's a co-conspirator that the government knows to be in continued communication with the defendant. The next day, the defendant booked a one-way ticket to Australia which the government learned about on Monday. That flight that he booked on Friday was scheduled to depart on Monday, three days later.

The government arrested him while he either was on the plane or had checked in for the flight clearly with an intention to board that flight.

In the defendant's possession at the time that he was arrested was over \$12,000 in U.S. cash which the defendant did not declare as is required on U.S. Customs forms and which just by nature of having it in his possession as he attempted to board a flight to Australia without declaring it is prima facie evidence of a violation of the Bulk Cash Smuggling Act which is 31 U.S. Code 5332(a).

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And in addition to the over \$12,000 in cash that he had in his possession, he had two cashier's checks which are the functional equivalent of cash, one for \$30,000 and one for \$50,000, both made payable to him in his name.

In addition to that, he had three cell phones in his possession. In addition to that, he had multiple betting slips showing recent wages on sports betting which of course is concordant with all of the conduct alleged in the complaint.

Your Honor, the government submits that that pattern of behavior, booking a flight, a one-way ticket to Australia the day after the government attempts to interview a co-conspirator with whom the defendant is in regular communication and attempting to board that flight with \$80,000 in cashier's checks, an additional \$12,000, none of which he declared, so that's in total over \$90,000 that had to be declared that was not declared, and three cell phones, or strong indicia that he was attempting to flee the country. He has long known about the government's investigation. And as the circle began to tighten, he took steps to flee.

In addition, as the complaint sets forth in paragraph 35, there's at least one example of the defendant and other co-conspirators participating in

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group text message chats in which they discuss a destruction of evidence on their cell phones relating to the conduct that underlies this investigation.

Your Honor, 18 U.S. Code 3142(f)(2)(A) and (B) talk specifically about attempts or concerns that the defendant will either flee, that's subsection (A), or obstruct justice, that's subsection (B). The government submits that there is evidence already that the defendant has engaged with his co-conspirators in attempts to obstruct justice both by the destruction of evidence and to flee as evidenced by his conduct in response to the government investigation.

For those reasons, the government submits that there are no set of condition that can assure his reappearance. And if we get to the suretors, the government has concerns with that as well which I'm happy to address now or --

THE COURT: Sure. Why don't I hear you on the suretors since --

MR. WEINTRAUB: So just to start off the top, at least one of the three suretors has conduct that is within the -- is engaged in conduct that is within the scope of the government's investigation and has engaged in numerous sports bets that are within the government's investigation and has made transfers that -- the

complaint talks about transfers made, they are peer to peer payment applications, Venmo, Zelle, things of that nature.

One of the suretors has engaged in numerous payments using those apps with numerous of the defendants in this case as well as numerous other individuals who are subjects of the government's investigation. So that person who has engaged in suspicious sports betting and has engaged in numerous financial transactions with codefendants and other co-conspirators who are not charged renders that person I think fiducially unfit to be a suretor.

With respect to the other two suretors, one of them -- neither of them speaks to the defendant very frequently but they speak maybe once a week. One of them is a stay-at-home mother who makes no money and has no income and for that reason is not a particularly viable suretor. And the third suretor would be acceptable, but that's just one of three.

And your Honor, the fact that the defendant is proposing to even offer one of the suretors who is, and the defendant surely knows this, given the overlap between that person's betting activity and money transfer activity, you know, at the very least a co-conspirator, unwitting co-conspirator in this conduct is troubling in

1 and of itself.

THE COURT: Okay. Counsel?

MR. SOSNICK: Thank you, your Honor. My client is 38 years old. He's a United States citizen. He came to this country from Vietnam when he was a little boy. He's lived in Queens for the past 32 years. He's never been convicted of a crime. He engages in professional poker playing. When I spoke with him, he told me he's in the top 1 percent in the world in professional poker playing.

He was going to Australia to participate in a poker competition and from there he was going to go to Japan and then return to New York.

My client has been charged with one count of wire fraud. There's been no allegation of any violence. There's been no allegation of anybody being injured. And in this case, because I looked at the report from Pretrial Services recommending that the defendant be released with an unsecured surety insurance bond cosigned by at least two financially responsible people, I had my client's three sisters appear in court. One flew here from Texas. The other two live in Queens. One is a stay-at-home mom, as the prosecutor said, but she's married to a man who works and supports the family and earns approximately \$65,000 a year.

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Proceedings

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The other two sisters who live here in the Eastern District of New York, Queens County to be specific, are a pharmacist who makes approximately \$150,000 a year, and a registered nurse who makes approximately the same amount of money. All three sisters love their brother very much. They have moral suasion over him. They are in touch with him on a weekly basis, sometimes more frequently, and they will do whatever is necessary to ensure that their brother comes to court because they love him, they want him to do the right thing, they expect him to do the right thing. And they're willing to cosign a bond as is recommended by Pretrial Services in whatever amount the Court deems to be appropriate, \$100,000, \$250,000. The recommendation of Pretrial Services is that this unsecured bond be cosigned by at least two financially responsible people. Clearly two sisters who earn approximately \$150,000, one is a licensed pharmacist, and one is a licensed registered nurse, who both live in this district are financially responsible individuals. The additional conditions are report to Pretrial Services as directed. My client will do whatever he's directed to do. His travel is supposed to be restricted to New York City, Long Island, and as

approved by Pretrial Services. He's agreeable to that.

Surrender passport and do not obtain any new travel documents. The government has already obtained my client's passport when he attempted to go to abroad to participate in that international poker competition and he certainly will not seek to obtain any new travel documents.

Be subject to random home and/or employment visits. His door is wide open. He has no secrets. And he will be very happy to greet any government agents who want to come and see what he is doing and how he's living. He's always led a law abiding life. As I said, he's 38 years old with no prior criminal history of any kind or nature whatsoever.

The fifth condition is that he actively seek or maintain legitimate and verifiable employment. He's all in for that.

And finally, no contact with any co-defendants or co-conspirators. I note that the government said that there were text messages, but there never was any destruction of any evidence. There is no obstruction charge. There's just the one wire fraud. Now that Pretrial Services has weighed in on this topic of not having any communication with co-defendants or co-conspirators, if the Court includes that in the

conditions of release, my client will have no such contact.

I want to be clear the government has suspicions and has concerns, but at the end of the day we're dealing with a nonviolent crime, a single count of wire fraud against --

THE COURT: Well, it sounds like he's going to be possibly charged with transporting money out of the country without reporting it which is often a crime we see here. So I understand what you're saying but I'm concerned about the package itself. Which of the suretors that's been offered, the pharmacist or the nurse, is the one that you have concern about?

MR. WEINTRAUB: It's the pharmacist, the one who makes \$150,000 and lives here in Ozone Park. And there are several other concerns that we have based on some of the representations made by counsel. Of course, Pretrial Services' recommendation, I'm not sure if they were aware of the items that were in the defendant's possession when he was attempting to board the flight. So I just don't know if they were or they weren't, but the Court is now aware of those facts.

The assurances that the defendant will not communicate with co-defendants is concerning because the government already has reason to believe that there are

13 Proceedings 1 individuals, or at least one individual, who speaks to 2 all the defendants. Okay? There's an individual who at 3 one point represented to the government that he 4 represented another one of the defendants. And based on 5 information that the government knows, that defendant was 6 introduced to that individual from another one of the defendants. 7 8 THE COURT: When you say represented, in the legal sense? 9 10 MR. WEINTRAUB: Yes. 11 THE COURT: Okay. 12 MR. WEINTRAUB: The government was contacted by 13 an individual who claimed that he represented one of the 14 co-defendants at a certain point in time. 15 THE COURT: I see. 16 MR. WEINTRAUB: Today the defendant, when he 17 was attempting to obtain counsel, told Federal Defenders 18 that he wanted to call that same person in an attempt to 19 have that person represent him or have that person assist him in finding representation. That same person was 20 21 introduced to one of the other defendants by a third defendant. 22 23 So my point is that there's a single individual 24 or we know to be in communication with three of the co-

defendants. So there's a very obvious and easy way for

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## Proceedings

the defendant to not violate the terms of pretrial release and still communicate with his co-conspirators. We know that he has communicated with co-conspirators in the presence of that individual who maybe represents some of them, maybe doesn't. So that is a concern to the government.

The fact that the defendant claims to be in the top 1 percent of all poker players in the world means he would have a lot of money and all the resources in the world to flee, and a sister who makes \$140,000 a year, you know, (A), could easily take the hit of a bail jumping charge in the event that this defendant really is one of the top 1 percent poker players in the world, but also the government's investigation has uncovered substantial evidence of serious concerning conduct regarding poker playing in particular. It's not in the complaint. The government of course can proffer facts to the Court that are not in the complaint. But the defendant has long been involved in poker playing and in helping to run and organize underground poker games here.

And so the defendant's continued involvement in poker playing is not a fact that the government views enures to his sort of benefit. It is part and parcel of a world of illicit gambling activity both poker gambling and sports betting gambling that is the very core of the

1 case here.

THE COURT: Okay. Anything you want to add, counsel?

MR. SOSNICK: Your Honor, before the government convicts every one of my client's family members this afternoon, I simply want to point out that my client has led a law-abiding life ever since he came to this country. He loves this country. He is a good citizen with no criminal history of any kind or nature whatsoever.

As far as these checks are concerns, my client denies that he had negotiable checks in his possession. And with respect to the count of the cash, if it was \$12,000, then yes, it was \$2,000 over the amount that would require reporting. I'm not sure that my client knew exactly how much money he had in his possession.

But be that as it may, the point I'm making to the Court is that my client is willing to sign a bond in whatever amount the Court directs. And all three of his sisters, who are in court today, who have moral suasion over my client, are willing to cosign that bond. And these allegations that my client can make all kinds of money and that whatever the amount of the bond is the sisters can take the hit, it's just in my opinion inappropriate. It's inappropriate. We have three

## Proceedings

sisters who are all United States citizens who love their brother, who have no criminal convictions and have no criminal history of any kind or nature whatsoever. They come to a courthouse in the United States of America to cosign a bond and they're accused of all kinds of nefarious activities including signing a bond and not worrying about the consequences of signing the bond.

They're very much aware of the circumstances surrounding the signing of a bond, the serious nature of signing a bond in a United States courthouse. But they love their brother and they know he will come back to court whenever he's required to be here and that he will abide by all of the conditions of the Court and Pretrial Services.

And I'm simply asking the Court to follow the recommendation of Pretrial Services in a case involving a United States citizen with no prior criminal history in a case involving one count of wire fraud.

MR. WEINTRAUB: Your Honor, the government has photos of the two cashier checks that were found in the defendant's luggage, so I'm not sure what basis there is to assert that he didn't have those in his possession. I don't see how they could have gotten in there by accident.

And the government is by no means accusing all

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of the suretors of anything. The government is accusing one of the suretors of being involved and having a pattern of suspicious sports betting activity and suspicious money transferring activity that is at the very least suspicious and potentially involved in a money laundering activity just given the nature of transferring money to a number of co-conspirators and co-defendants. And the government's not accusing any of the suretors of taking lightly the responsibilities of being a suretor. The government is raising concerns over the defendant's willingness to abide by the terms of his bail.

And just one last thing, your Honor. The idea that he was going to Australia for a poker tournament, he booked the ticket on a Friday to leave on a Monday, a day after an attempt to interview a co-conspirator. That's much more in line with attempts to flee than attempts to go play in a poker tournament halfway around the world on a one-way ticket.

MR. SOSNICK: Your Honor, regardless of the government's conjecture on this point, my client stands by what he told me and I must point out that neither the singular charge against my client nor any of the potential charges that have been raised in the government's presentation to this Court require any jail time and therefore, for him to be detained when he's

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                            Proceedings
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   entitled to the presumption of innocence --
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              THE COURT: Let me just stop you for a second.
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   There's no potential jail time for the --
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              MR. SOSNICK: I think --
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              THE COURT: -- charge contained in the
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   complaint?
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              MR. WEINTRAUB: I think what he might be
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   referring to is there's no mandatory minimum. There's a
    20-year statutory maximum for conspiracy to commit wire
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   fraud.
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              THE COURT: Okay. I just wanted to correct the
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   record --
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              MR. WEINTRAUB: I believe that's what he might
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   have been --
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              THE COURT: -- because I wasn't quite sure what
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   statutory charge was here that didn't require --
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              MR. SOSNICK: Counsel is correct. I'm saying
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   there is no mandatory --
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              THE COURT: Okay. Fine. Thank you.
              MR. SOSNICK: -- jail time for this singular
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   charge or any of the other charges that were discussed by
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   the prosecutor. And to just lock my client up when
   he's --
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              THE COURT: Well, let me -- I'm just going to
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   stop you right here because here's what I'm going to tell
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                            Proceedings
   you. I don't think the package you offered is
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   sufficient. I'm not prepared today to say that there are
   no conditions or combination of conditions that would
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   result will provide the government and the Court with the
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   assurances that your client would come back.
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              But the circumstances behind the purchase of
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   the ticket at the last minute, the fact of the money
   and --
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              THE DEFENDANT: There's no $80,000 cashier's
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   check, your Honor.
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              MR. WEINTRAUB: I have a photo of them.
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              THE COURT: Okay.
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              MR. WEINTRAUB: I mean --
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              THE DEFENDANT: That's just a deposit from
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   months ago.
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              THE COURT: You know what? You need to not --
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              THE DEFENDANT: I can't --
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              THE COURT: -- speak. As I said, anything you
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    say to me could later come back to haunt you if the
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   government can prove you're wrong. So if you want to
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   speak to me, I really urge you to talk through your
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   attorney. Okay? So --
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              THE DEFENDANT: Your Honor, I don't need to
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   talk to my attorney for this one. There's no $80,000
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   cashier's check. And if there is, you can cuff me now.
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I stand by it. There's no \$80,000 cashier's check.

THE COURT: I mean we can put it into evidence, but I'm still going to rule the way I was going to rule regardless which is I don't find the package sufficient. The questions raised about the one suretor raised questions in my mind about whether or not the suretor's involvement in the sports betting scheme if you will makes her an acceptable financially responsible suretor.

I'm sure his other sister who is a homemaker would be a perfectly fine person to provide moral suasion. But given the amount of money involved here, I think the single signature of one financially responsible suretor is not sufficient.

And so I'm going to order him detained but you're free to come back to court at any point if you can come back with more financially responsible suretors and persuade the Court that your client is going to come back to court.

MR. SOSNICK: Your Honor, I tried to work out the bail package with the government and they said you can't. Basically pushed me away and said we don't agree to anything. We're going to contest this. We want him detained.

THE COURT: I understand. You don't have to have the government's agreement. You can come back and

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   make another bail application that is more persuasive
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   hopefully. Okay?
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              MR. SOSNICK: So your Honor, you want more than
    the three sisters to cosign?
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                          Well, one of the sisters is not an
              THE COURT:
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    acceptable suretor. Yes, I want --
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              MR. SOSNICK: So two are?
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              THE COURT: I want another financially
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    responsible suretor.
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              MR. SOSNICK: Well your Honor, I just want to
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    draw your attention to the --
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              THE COURT: I am not bound by the
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    recommendation --
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              MR. SOSNICK: No, I'm not saying --
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              THE COURT: -- of Pretrial Services.
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              MR. SOSNICK: I'm not saying you are.
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              THE COURT: And based on that recommendation,
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    you haven't satisfied it. You have one financially
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    responsible suretor, the nurse I guess, and the other
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    one, homemaker, is an acceptable suretor but she doesn't
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   have any money. So she has no income, therefore, she is
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    not a financially responsible suretor.
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              MR. SOSNICK: So your Honor, if I have her
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   husband cosign the bond together with the registered
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    nurse who is the sister, then you have two financially
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                            Proceedings
   responsible suretors and that's what I would suggest to
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   the Court. And you could make the bond for any amount
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   that you think is fair and reasonable.
              THE COURT: Is the husband here?
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              MR. SOSNICK: No, he's not here.
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              THE COURT: Okay. Well, I'm not about to enter
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   a bond today without seeing him and having the government
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   interview him and Pretrial interview him to make sure he
   is an acceptable suretor. So you can come back, as I
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   said, but I'm not going to enter a bond today. He's
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   going to be detained. Okay?
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              MR. SOSNICK: I hope the government's happy.
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   We're certainly not.
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              THE CLERK: And I quess we have the issue of a
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   preliminary hearing.
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              MR. SOSNICK: When is it scheduled for?
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              THE CLERK:
                         Well, I think ten days if --
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              MR. SOSNICK:
                            14 days I thought.
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              THE CLERK:
                         Sorry, 14, yes. In two weeks.
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              MR. SOSNICK: So what's the day?
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              THE CLERK: Are you waiving or you would
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   like --
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              MR. SOSNICK: What's the day?
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              THE CLERK: Well, if you are not waiving, then
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   today's the 4th, so I guess it would be like June 18 for
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                            Proceedings
   a preliminary hearing at your request. The government
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   has until June 18th to indict or dismiss or for more
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   time.
              MR. SOSNICK: I'd like to discuss this issue
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   with my client because it's not something we discussed.
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              THE CLERK: Yeah, you can do that now if you
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   want and address it today.
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              THE COURT: We could always schedule the
   preliminary hearing and if you decide that your client
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   wants to waive it, just let us know and it just won't go
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   forward.
              That's fine.
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              MR. SOSNICK: All right. And what about a date
   to come back, your Honor, assuming I can arrange for
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14
   transportation for the brother-in-law's appearance here
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   in court from Texas?
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              THE COURT: Well, what I would say is find out
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   when he can be here and just let us know.
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              THE DEFENDANT:
                              Tomorrow.
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              MR. SOSNICK: Just a second, please. Your
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   Honor, do you sit in the morning or only the afternoon?
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              THE COURT: No, we sit in the morning at 11 or
22
    2.
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              MR. SOSNICK: Okay. So I just want to be sure
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   he's here. All right.
                            Then your Honor, what about
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   tomorrow at 2 o'clock?
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                            Proceedings
              THE COURT:
                          Sui May?
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                          It would be fine.
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              THE CLERK:
 3
                          Okay. 2 o'clock tomorrow.
              THE COURT:
              MR. SOSNICK:
                            Thank you very much, your Honor.
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 5
                          I guess I'll do a temporary or
              THE CLERK:
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    should I just (inaudible) --
 7
              THE COURT: Yes, that's fine.
 8
              THE CLERK: That's fine, okay. So tomorrow at
 9
    2 o'clock.
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              MR. SOSNICK: Very good.
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              THE CLERK: We'll make sure he's back because I
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    think it's a little bit late for (indiscernible).
13
              MR. WEINTRAUB: I'll make sure.
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              THE CLERK: Thank you.
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              THE COURT: Okay. I direct the prosecution to
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    comply with your obligations under Brady v. Maryland and
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    its progeny to disclose to the defense all information
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    whether admissible or not that is favorable to the
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    defendant material either to guilt or to punishment known
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    to the prosecution.
21
              Possible consequences for noncompliance may
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    include dismissal of individual charges or the entire
    case, exclusion of evidence, professional discipline or
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    court sanctions on the attorneys responsible.
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              I will be entering a written order more fully
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    describing this obligation and the possible consequences
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    of failing to meet it and I direct the prosecution to
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    review and comply with that order.
 4
              Does the prosecution confirm that you
 5
    understanding your obligations and will fulfill them?
              MR. WEINTRAUB: Yes, your Honor. Is a date for
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 7
    the preliminary hearing set?
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              THE CLERK: Do you want to deal with it
 9
    tomorrow?
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              MR. SOSNICK: Yeah, let's defer that to
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    tomorrow and hopefully we'll be able to resolve the bail
    issue tomorrow and then hopefully we'll be able to waive
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13
    the preliminary hearing as well.
14
              THE CLERK: Okay.
15
              MR. SOSNICK: Thank you very much. Your Honor,
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    I appreciate all the time and consideration.
17
              THE COURT: Oh, no. Thank you.
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              MR. SOSNICK: We do look forward to seeing you
19
    tomorrow afternoon.
20
              THE CLERK: Okay. Thank you. Preliminary
21
    hearing not dealt with.
22
                         (Matter concluded)
23
                               -000-
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#### CERTIFICATE

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I, MARY GRECO, hereby certify that the foregoing transcript of the said proceedings is a true and accurate transcript from the electronic sound-recording of the proceedings reduced to typewriting in the above-entitled matter.

I FURTHER CERTIFY that I am not a relative or employee or attorney or counsel of any of the parties, nor a relative or employee of such attorney or counsel, or financially interested directly or indirectly in this action.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I hereunto set my hand this  ${\color{red} {\bf 10th}}$  day of  ${\color{red} {\bf June}}$ , 2024.

Mary Areco
Transcriptions Plus II, Inc.